

**NPS-09-16-09 Batch 1**

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Transcription Date: 09/20/09 - Transcriber: RMR

[BEGIN AUDIO]

MR. DANIEL MARTINEZ: After you finished telephone school, what happened to you next?

MR. JOHN V. GARDNER: Well we were, I was attached to the 2nd Defense Battalion there at the Marine Corps base and they were in the process of creating I think 12 Defense Battalions, whatever the number was and from the 2nd we split off and formed the 6th Defense Battalion and eventually we moved in one of the barracks and we would go to Point Loma and fire the five inch guns, the same vintage as those that are here on Midway now. Why I was in five inch artillery I have no idea, it's the roll of the dice, however the number comes up. But again, it was luck. Just pure luck. It was good for me.

MR. MARTINEZ: How's that?

MR. GARDNER: Well they were a good bunch of people. We had a fine Officer, Lieutenant Donalund Otis and Lieutenant Collins and I think that Lieutenant Otis was an Annapolis graduate. I'm certain he was. He was a typical Marine, looked like a Marine should. It was enjoyable and my communication work with PFC Barker, the other communication fellow was amiable. We got along well and we just didn't have any trouble. Everything worked very nicely, very nicely for us.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well let's talk about your trip from San Diego, you went from San Diego to Honolulu?

MR. GARDNER: That's true, on the USS Wharton.

MR. MARTINEZ: And then how long were you in Honolulu?

MR. GARDNER: Not very long. As I recall we departed San Diego on June 4th, I remember that because it was my mother's birthday and we were there, if you think about it I had departed Pearl Harbor Marine Barracks for Midway Island around the 10th of August. So we were there a couple of months. I came to Midway with the

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Advanced Detail of the 6th Defense Battalion. Probably no more than 150 men to relieve 150 men, or whatever it was from the 3rd Defense. And we came out here in the USS S.S. Chester, and that is incorrectly documented in some books. It definitely was the Chester and Astoria and I was on Astoria. We arrived here off of the channel and they met us with a tug pulling a barge, brought it alongside, we came down and they brought out the men we were relieving. They boarded the two cruisers and we came into the island. It was about a month before the rest of the 6th Defense Battalion arrived here.

[video skips]

MR. MARTINEZ: You disembarked from the Astoria, how did you come ashore?

MR. GARDNER: There was a tug brought a small barge, lighter out there, and they had the 3rd Defense people aboard that we relieved. They boarded and we came off of the ship and they went on the ship and we came right in the present day channel. And disembarked over at the old dock which isn't there anymore.

MR. MARTINEZ: What were your first impressions of Midway?

MR. GARDNER: My first impression was out there about four or five miles when I saw a little thin strip of white. These trees, there weren't many trees here, the only ones were right here. It was kind of lonely. Exciting but kind of lonely.

MR. MARTINEZ: Did thoughts cross your mind like what did I put in for?

MR. GARDNER: Oh I don't recall that. It was a challenge, you're a kid and you're interested in doing these things, but I think the thought was I wonder how long we'll be here.

MR. MARTINEZ: How old were you when you landed on Midway?

MR. GARDNER: 19.

MR. MARTINEZ: Let me repeat that okay? And maybe you can say I was 19 when I landed on Midway. How old were you when you landed on Midway?

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MR. GARDNER: I was 19 years old when I landed on Midway.

MR. MARTINEZ: So what duties were immediately assigned to you?

MR. GARDNER: Well we moved into the tents at that time they were building a Marine Barracks. We moved into the tents and we were C Battery, five inch artillery, but it was A Battery, 3rd Defense that went back to Pearl Harbor so we assumed their gun positions not far from where we're sitting. [video skips] And we continued to improve the defense and improve the communication and Barker and I had to make daily communication checks out there, that was a daily thing. Our gun crews did gun drills, tracking drills and we'd work until about noon, half day schedule actually, until September, mid-September when the balance of the organization arrived. And then the C Battery, 6th Defense personnel, myself included, we moved up to our position just over here where we've located it and then the regular 6th Defense, A Battery assumed that position with Lieutenant Frasier and his group.

MR. MARTINEZ: Can you kind of visually describe what your placement looked like?

MR. GARDNER: We were just on the westward edge of these ironwood trees. The ironwood trees only was in this area and our guns were just forward of the ironwood trees looking about as westward as you could. They were up on two mounds, they were sand-bagged approximately four feet high, circular sand bag emplacement. They were reasonably well camouflaged with scaviola. We had nets that were put over the guns, kept them covered. There was a ready box on each gun position with probably 10 to 12 rounds of powder and shell. The Battery Commander's lookout was just behind us. He could look right down in the gun tubs.

MR. MARTINEZ: Did you have a bunker at that time or did those come later?

MR. GARDNER: We had a bunker for the Fire Control Center only. There were no bunkers for personnel had been built. So early days after December 7th, it was

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touchy where the people slept in case we had a sudden attack and somebody bursted a shell right in there on top of us.

MR. MARTINEZ: Right. This five inch gun that you were part of, how far could it throw a round out?

MR. GARDNER: Well maximum of about 13,000 yards, but not very effective fire, you'd be lobbing. Guns were more effective at 5,000 to 6,000 yards.

MR. MARTINEZ: Now, did you in that gun emplacement already track where your area of effective fire would be? Did you have that all worked out?

MR. GARDNER: Well the 3rd Defense worked that out when the guns [video skips] Oh yes, they were surveyed in.

MR. MARTINEZ: How much practice firing did you do here?

MR. GARDNER: Very little here, we did most of it at San Diego. We fired maybe once that I can think of.

MR. MARTINEZ: Really?

MR. GARDNER: Mm hm. We didn't have the ammunition really to waste at least.

MR. MARTINEZ: Take me up to the events of December 5, 1941. What happened on that day?

MR. GARDNER: On December 5th I got the island security guard duty which was the only time I ever had it for the reason the communication personnel did get a lot of breaks and perks, let's call it, they call it nowadays. We had to check communication on the guns daily so we had a duty that the others didn't have so we were exempt from guard duty. But on this particular day I had the guard duty because we had four or five people in sick bay. Fell out for guard on Friday morning the 5th, a rather informal guard, khaki and you know no field scarves or anything. Lieutenant Cannon was Officer of the Day on that morning, the 5th, a real nice gentleman, nice looking

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man. He read a message to us that was from CincPac as I recall it and it said maintain a vigorous alert. Japanese Fleet maneuvering in your area.

MR. MARTINEZ: Who was the message from?

MR. GARDNER: I say CincPac, I think there's been changes in that designation since. But it came from Pearl Harbor Command. There's no question where it came from.

MR. MARTINEZ: Could you describe for me the events two days later on December 7, 1941?

MR. GARDNER: Could I describe to you the watch from the 5th and 6th?

MR. MARTINEZ: Absolutely.

MR. GARDNER: If you want that. It has a point of interest, it always has to me. I had the dock watch. Now that dock is not there anymore and I had the four to eight and so I didn't have a watch until that Friday afternoon at 4:00 and I watched the Philippine Clipper land, taxi over and tie up to its buoy on the north side of the dock. They had a little vessel they brought the passengers over and they climb up the dock and Pan American had a Ford Woody Station Wagon as I [video skips] got in that and they were driven over to this exquisite hotel, I guess it wasn't too shabby. I was never in there but they went there and I was an interesting thing because I had seen the Philippine Clipper at Alameda Naval, at the Alameda Base, it wasn't a Naval Air Station then. And I had take a picture of it, and I still have the picture. So it was very interesting to me to watch this and I liked airplanes anyway. The following morning, I'm back on watch at four to eight, I watched those people carried back and unloaded out of the Woody Station Wagon and they went out to their airplane. They taxied out and took off and I watched them swing around the south side of this island to go to Wake and the night of the 7th of December they returned. I'll always remember that sight. What happened on the 7th you asked me.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well, let's describe your personal experience that day.

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MR. GARDNER: Since I had the guard and got of Saturday and Sundays was an easy day, we could do the communication check almost when we wanted to so Barker and I could go out at 10:00 in the morning or whenever, just do it. And I slept in, I was always the lazy sort I like sleeping. I never liked to get up early in the morning. So I slept in, but with the noise as usual I didn't sleep to well. It seems to me it was around, it was after 7:00 or so in the morning I finally was roused out and I walked over to the showers and to back up a little bit, one of the other fellows, and I think it was Barker, and I bought a Helicrafter short wave radio from Major Archie O'Neil. He had advanced to a better one and we paid him \$35.00 for his old one. So we had to divide the cost and it was between our bunks and it was fun to play with. As I came back from the shower, he and a couple of other guys had their ear down to the radio and they were listening and they had said Gardner the Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor. Well you know you heard all this kind of stuff all the time and I was not sure about this. I was a skeptic. But then I began to listen and it was short wave, but coming in pretty good. And it was obviously down under people, it was Australia or New Zealand and the first words that I clearly understood was that the United States would be giving all the aid that we can. That made you perk up and I began to listen. Pearl Harbor has been attacked. There's ships burning and so on and since our guns, our C Battery guns now had been picked up off of those mounts that I described to you earlier, the civilian contractors had done this, and they moved them forward let's say 50 feet on another knob of sand on their old wooden mounts, and right behind in the surveyed in positions where they removed them from, they dug a hold probably 12 feet deep and they had poured a concrete slab and put rebar steel in there. They were going to pour concrete mounts for us. That was what was underway. And when our guns were moved forward I had to take the lighting and firing circuits. The communication guys did this. And they were in heavy cable big as your thumb and

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various connector blocks that were bolted and screwed on and they were put in a big chest in the godown. We had a building just back inside the tree line over here called the go down, which is a Chinese word for storage shed. We had China Marines, ex-China Marines is how that came about. And I was told to put those harnesses, Barker and I put them in those chests. Well we can't fire those guns without that. They're utterly useless, but I wasn't ordered to put them back on because this job apparently would only take a couple weeks and there wasn't going to be any war anyway, so it didn't make any difference.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well tell us why, I'm not sure I understand, tell us why the guns would be useless without these firing mechanisms.

MR. GARDNER: No lights in the scopes and no lights in the data receivers, primarily.

MR. MARTINEZ: Okay. So electricity was a primary concern.

MR. GARDNER: They were fired by battery. Now those guns came off of the battle ships. They were secondary five inch fifty-ones off the battle ships and had been removed and replaced with a new 538 dual purpose gun. That was the best thing I guess available to Midway and Wake, they were brought here. So our guns are sitting up on these two sand knobs, they're utterly useless, absolutely useless and did I tell you about waking the Gunnery Sergeant up, I've told you that?

MR. MARTINEZ: No sir.

MR. GARDNER: Well, after this message was received on the radio was affirmed that there really was something happening. Pearl Harbor was under attack. I think that was the day I grew to manhood, I matured. I had guts because to go in and wake up a Gunnery Sergeant, pretty touchy deal in the Marine Corps, you didn't go above rank. He's an old salty China Marine. They slept in the barracks, but only a few feet away and I went in to awaken him. And he had a hangover. The Staff Non-coms had had a beer party that night. I shook him and woke him and he looked at me through

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his blurry eyes and Gardner what do you want or whatever and I told him, I said "Gunny, the Japs are bombing Pearl Harbor". He couldn't believe this. Gardner he says, that's like telling me they kidnapped the President of the United States. And I said Gunny, the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor and should I got to the guns and put the firing circuits on. And after a bit of aggravation, it seemed like a couple minutes to me, he finally just gave up and he said if it will make you happy, why don't you two guys go out to the guns and put the firing circuits on? Back to the tent, told Barker let's go, we put our packs on, our old fashioned steel helmets and our old 30-ot 6 Springfields and I will tell you that I was right here in this area when the island said condition one and announced what was going on. So I always have said and I will maintain it to my deathbed, we were the first two people who went to war at Midway Island. So we proceeded to the guns. We started working on those circuits. Mind you, we're not really electricians, but we took them off so we had the memory how to get them on we hoped. And we struggled with that throughout the day, had to be sure they had batteries on those because, being shipboard they would have been powered up, but we had batteries to light the crosshairs in the scopes and the data receivers. It was about 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon I'd estimate that Major O'Neil came out to the various batteries, came to C Battery and Barker and I were told to stay up on the guns and keep working on those firing circuits. They had the rest of the gun crews down below. I could hear everything they were saying as we worked. And I recall Major O'Neil, he was a dapper sort of a man, he wore his leather - - tees and always carried a swagger stick, sort of a British type person. And his words were to the crew he said, well, he said the little brown bastards has got the jump on us. But he says I think we can whip them in about six months. That I remember distinctly. I went ahead, Barker and I did with our work, got the firing circuits on. The gun crews were now working to get some sand bags and build some



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parapets around those guns. Say in five or six hours you can't put up much of a parapet, but they worked at it. We had no ammunition up there, had to get some bags up and get some ammunition from somewhere protected in a ready box. It was a very busy and tiring day. I guess they brought us out some chow. I don't remember. We may not have eaten, I don't know. But there was no quarters for us. I was assigned to the plotting room, the fire control room on the telephone switchboard. Barker, the other communicator, would be in the Battery Commander's tower with, in this case Lieutenant Otis, and there was one other person, and I forgot just who it is, I'm not really sure, in the tower as dusk came we set condition two, which meant we had partial gun crews and we were almost ready to fire. And then as dark came, we set condition one and we were ready to fire. I don't think C Battery could have fired. Could have fired, could have threw something out there in the ocean, because we just weren't in that condition. A Battery was alright. Baker Battery on the other side was alright.

MR. MARTINEZ: Later that evening, however, you did get a visit.

MR. GARDNER: Yeah, that's very memorable. I remember that clearly. I was again in a little cubicle not much bigger than I am here with the switchboard and the door into the plotting room. The plotting room was probably 10 by 12 feet. I think there were seven men in there, but there was Lieutenant Collins, Gunnery Sergeant Becket and probably five men, no more than that. And that's, there's a plotting board in there. And the plotting board wasn't designed for this type of warfare. It was an artillery plotting board known as a Whistler-Hearn board. It was probably on, take a, as a semi-circle, wood, and down the back side, if you split a circle in two. It was done in brass, it was kind of a pretty thing. And it had two arms that crossed on it 180 degrees red around the outer side. And out at Frigate Point, got out that way, we had a base end station, and we should have had one way over here on the other

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side with the guns more or less in the middle of the two, but it wasn't do-able on Midway, so the one base end station was right there at our Battery Commander tower and the one was Frigate Point out here. Now those fellows have a scope with a green circle and they sight in through the scope on the target, preferably on the forward stack when possible, and the second person with telephone head set on reads the azimuth of that target to the plotting room and one of the fellows on each of the arms is connected to one of those two base ends and he sets whatever azimuth they're reading to you. In the center of the board you get a cross. That would be range to target. That would be giving the data that then in turn was telephoned up to the guns to the pointer and the trainer. The pointer as we learned the other day and you remember, raised the tube for range and the trainer this way. There's also a sight setter on there that corrects for powder temperature and various conditions. Correction windys and so on. And we were unable to do anything that night not only because our guns were poorly prepared, as I say we could have fired, but I don't know what we could have done. As the Japanese vessels attack the gun flashes and you can't range on gun flashes, but we're a little ahead of the story at this point.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well, let's go back to the story. When did you realize that there were Japanese vessels out there? You, yourself.

MR. GARDNER: They're very, again, very interesting.

MR. MARTINEZ: Let's go back to the events and how that, when did you first realize that you were under attack from these Japanese ships that night.

MR. GARDNER: Well we can build it up. As I say we were in condition one at the prime time that military experts think they attack would come. Mind you the PBYS had done great patrol out here, but they missed the ships that were out there. And having went on a patrol one time in November about 51 years ago now, I can

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understand it because you can't see much. You just have to be luck to see the wake of ship. So we're not going to fault those. After dark for a bit, I'm going to hazard a guess with darkness coming as it does in December, probably around 7:00 we were set to condition, which meant we went into a semi-alert state. The people were off of the watches, were told to get some rest. In the plotting room that I was in, they were told to lay down and get some sleep. I was awake on the switchboard. Lieutenant Collins was awake and Joe Beckett, Gunnery Sergeant Joe Beckett was awake. The other guys were too, but they were supposed to be asleep, trying to get sleep. Because we knew something was liable to happen even though the aircraft reported no targets, it was likely. The radar here, the 270 that was located about where we're sitting I'd say it was right here in this area, was an unknown thing to us. The Navy kept that very secret. It was a 270 radar. There was one at Pearl Harbor or the weigh in area, similar, same. The Navy would play with it when the Clipper would be coming in from Wake or approaching us to get some practice. We were told what it would do, but you know, doubting Thomases. We never did a drill with that radar and relayed it to our guns. The afternoon and evening the radar was, the radar was running after we were alerted to Pearl Harbor I guess all day. But long in the evening, after we set condition two, I was on the switchboard, and we had what we called a J line. This was a telephone line that tied these islands together from all the gun batteries. Now each machine gun was not on this, that would have been impossible. But the three five inch batters and the three anti-aircraft batteries were tied together. And it was just a party line, just a big party line. And you didn't talk on it, you talked only when you had some important business. Radar was tapped into that and they were giving us radar reports of targets, and I wish I could remember the exact azimuth, but I would say out here at around 220 degrees to the southwest of us, they were on three moving targets, moving left to right. Lieutenant Collins

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came in that little room. The bulkhead here was six or eight feet high and there's a big map on there. I would guess the map might have been four or five feet by four or five feet, and it was in I believe 100 yard grids and Sand Island was right in the middle of the map and right where the 270 radar set was a pin and there was a string on it. And he started playing around, I'm sitting here almost looking at it like this, watching him and I would tell him the radar report. 240, so many thousand yards, unidentified target. And he's stretch the string up there and put a pin in place. A little red, blue pin. And he did that for a few minutes. He says Gardner you keep this going. And I had three targets moving left to right, they were moving north-westerly. It began to develop into a picture. And the question was continually being asked by others, not by us, to the visual lookouts, including our own tower, do you see anything out there? Negative, negative. And there was clouds similar to what we've had here the last few days, some moonlight passing in and out. Negative. Continual negative. And the target, this track was developing but I have to tell you I was a skeptic as I'm sure everyone was. But as the targets got out to the northwest, and I could not tell you how many thousand yards, I don't remember, they did a 180. And I lost what we now know was the tanker. I don't know anything about that. It broke off and I did not have it in the plot, but they did a 180. I still wasn't aware, I'd say I was doubting, but when they started to shoot, I knew what it was. Except in my mind there were a lot more ships than two, there must have been 50 of them out there.

MR. MARTINEZ: When they started firing did you have any idea how far they were from the island when that first, according to that plot didn't give you any indication?

MR. GARDNER: Oh yes. I don't know how long they run though from the 180 see, I quit plotting you know there was too many things, there was no more plotting up. I don't know how many thousand yards the last were, the last plots were, I can't tell

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you. I quit plotting, we're being fired on and I'm screaming let's shoot. Nobody heard me, but that's what everybody wanted to do, shoot.

MR. MARTINEZ: I don't know if you're aware of it, but it appears from what I know, you were the first to ever plot enemy ships on radar.

MR. GARDNER: Well [video skips] no figment in my imagination it was Lieutenant Collins that figured it out and he says Gardner keep doing it. I don't think that H&S Battery, Command Battery, right here in this dugout was doing it. I don't know that, but I don't think so.

MR. MARTINEZ: Is Lieutenant Collins still alive?

MR. GARDNER: No, he passed away some time ago.

MR. MARTINEZ: Anybody besides you aware of all this radar technology that was being exchanged at that time, that you know in your reunion group?

MR. GARDNER: Not any person from C Battery, five inch, has ever attended a reunion that I know of.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well the fireworks start, describe what happened next.

MR. GARDNER: I could see about a dozen or 15, 50 ships out there and it sounded like a lot more than it was. They fired, you're on the J line, you can hear everything that's going on. Lots of confusion and Major O'Neil came on there and asked and wanted to know --

MR. MARTINEZ: Alright, cut, cut. We're going to cut.

MR. GARDNER: Well I'll tell you the other part of the story, I'll work it in, I'll give it to you what happened.

[technical]

MR. MARTINEZ: John after the plotting was all done, the fireworks started. Can you describe the events when the Japanese ships started firing on Midway?

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MR. GARDNER: Of course there was a lot of confusion, a lot of people talking on that J line. Major O'Neil ask Shannon as I understand it about what are you firing at and he didn't know, but the answer was we weren't firing, it was the Japanese. And they, our people in the tower, Barker and them that was also on the circuit, they were walking that gunfire, they were hitting down around A Battery, roughly in that area below us but as the ships were coming around right to left now, they're changing and some of the fellows feel that another salvo or two we could have been right in bracketed in one, but the attacking vessel checked fire, just for a moment. They had the [video skips] out quickly, I heard people talking about you can see people running on the deck and it's Japanese flag, I remember conversation of that type. The ship resumed fire within seconds and according to, there was a Corporal out on our Frigate Base end by the name of Boganreif and I can't at the moment give you the PFC's name, Boganreif was an ex-sea going Marine. They were pretty shook up because they were right in them. As those ships closed on them, they were in the muzzle blast. They were getting flashes right in their face. They said they could feel the heat off it. That destroyer closed in and if you walk out there today you'll see that reef is mighty close to Frigate Point. There are those as you've probably heard say that were in search lights and all, if they hadn't illuminated he might have went aground and we'd have a dandy time shooting. But he turned hard starboard broadside, resumed fire, and walked the fire up the island and then later the hangar was on fire. That's, I guess when Lieutenant Cannon was killed. It was fast, it was two or three minutes, seemed like an hour. I recall Dog Battery opening fire, I remember hearing the machine gun fire. They did fire on the ship. I don't know that I heard Baker Battery on the eastern fire. You know I had phones on and they were over there quite a ways. So you're getting verbal reports, but I heard it all at the time.

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MR. MARTINEZ: Were you frightened by your experience? Or how did you feel?

MR. GARDNER: Damn right I was! And I had my steel helmet there, that old one and we, when it started I put the steel helmet on. And look in the plotting room and the other guys would have their steel helmet on and then we'd look around to see who's chicken and drop our hat and put our hat back on. I must have put it on seemed liked a dozen times. Yeah, you're scared and you was hoping this damn thing gets over with pretty quick, and it did. Seemed like an hour, but it did. It was quick.

MR. MARTINEZ: When it was all over, what did you learn about your first experience in war? What did you learn about yourself and your equipment.

MR. GARDNER: I aged about 10 years that night and I think I matured over the next few weeks and became a man here on Midway Island and had confidence I think Barker and I did a good job. They always had communication, they never could gripe about that. Always had communication on our guns and we modernized the systems and put terminal strips down in the ground. A Battery had one blown out, so we learned to put that down.

MR. MARTINEZ: Blown out that evening?

MR. GARDNER: Yeah, there was a shell [video skips] think that Sergeant Anderson probably mentioned that to you. And Terrell F. Fowler was a communication man down there, and one of the two. He and I went through telephone school together. We grew a lot. Yeah you're afraid, you bet.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well there started to be a build up over the next few months and [video skips]

MR. GARDNER: Power house, that's a safe place. That was for the machine gun group.

MR. MARTINEZ: One of the safest places and it got hammered, huh?

MR. GARDNER: Yeah. I definitely recall.

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[technical]

MR. MARTINEZ: When the gunfire was going on, Lieutenant Cannon was hurt and I fact later would die from his wounds.

MR. GARDNER: Yes.

[technical]

MR. MARTINEZ: When did you learn of the casualties that had taken place at the power house?

MR. GARDNER: Being really honest with you, I can't tell you, probably within hours of the next morning. I really don't know.

MR. MARTINEZ: Is that when you found out who had been killed and wounded?

MR. GARDNER: Lieutenant Cannon's name of course was first mentioned. Corporal Hazelwood was again a friend of mine, he was in the same class with me in telephone school, and we knew he was wounded. The Private that, there were two other men as I recall. I didn't know them. They were machine gun people and I didn't know them.

MR. MARTINEZ: How did it make you feel that this was your first experience of war and people that you knew had been killed?

MR. GARDNER: I don't recall being overly emotional about it. You felt bad, of course, and you knew it could have been you. I can be more emotional watching an old war movie than I can sometimes the reality. I don't think I was that emotional. Yeah you're bothered, of course.

MR. MARTINEZ: Do you think that was part of your training?

MR. GARDNER: I think so. I think the Marine Corps training then was tough. I think maybe today its even worse, but more so I should say. But don't recall being really emotional or any tears. You're disturbed. Of course you're disturbed, they're your friends.



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MR. MARTINEZ: When that communications was also centered apparently there for the machine guns, but that J line that you were hooked up, did that get knocked out as a result of the hit?

MR. GARDNER: Well that leg off of it. Because according to Corporal Hazelwood, who I'd served with, was with at Camp Lejeune two years later, he said that that five inch shell actually did spin inside that, he really felt that. He said it was like bumblebee in there before it detonated. Before I guess it just hit just right.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well after the events of Pearl Harbor things changed dramatically around here. Can you kind of take us up to the eve of the battle of Midway and the changes and how that affected you in your job?

MR. GARDNER: Well we continued to improve our positions and more camouflage. There was hard work done every day, particularly in our battery where we didn't have any parapets. And I didn't sand bag much, but we all learned to do each other's job to a degree. That was wise. I learned quite a bit about the five inch guns as we reviewed the other day. It was smart to do that. And we were busy, we were kept busy. Bear in mind we had little communication. That little Helicrafter's radio would not receive AM stations on the west coast in the day time. There's a skip distance here at Midway and it happens to be right in the skip. As the sun would set we could easily listen to KSL Salt Lake, KGO Denver or KOA Denver, KGO San Francisco, and that was our source of information, passing it on. The few of us that happened to have a radio. What we got from the Marine Corps was pretty slim. But I remember hearing President Roosevelt's declaration of war.

MR. MARTINEZ: Really?

MR. GARDNER: Yeah.

MR. MARTINEZ: How did that make you feel when you heard that?

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MR. GARDNER: That kind of ran it up and down your back when he said that we can concede Wake, Midway and Guam. Yep.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well it looks like we weren't about ready to concede Midway and the build up started. What kind of changes took place here up to the battle of Midway?

MR. GARDNER: Continual, continual improvement of gun positions. It didn't really get serious though until about late April. Sometime in late April there was suspicion and we were told of that. And if my memory serves me, Colonel Shannon said to the effect that the Japanese are planning an attack and they had picked a date that was some historical event in Japanese history. I recall something about that. It seems to me like it was in the 20th of May time frame. In the meantime we're being reinforced. There's more people, a few more obsolete guns coming out and more ammunition and so on. That date came and went and he got back on the wire and sent a message actually. I remember writing the message transmitted from right here at H&S Battery to the effect that the Japanese are still coming fellows, it's not over. It's just they're picking another date. And then the tempo picked up, it seemed to me dramatically. There were more airplanes came in like the B17's, the B26's, the couple of torpedo bombers they were going to test out here the TBF's. The fellows, some that you've interviewed here, there was a lot of innovation took place. Four by four posts with an - - lock in the middle so use the BAR's to fire. The land mines that were planted all along these beaches. The ones that were contact mines, the ones that set upright about as big as that suitcase or smaller, had a target on the back to fire at to detonate, or we could bring them off with the telephone. The contact mines you step on. The place was mined. It was really hazardous to be around that beach. And as a telephone wire man, I didn't like it because I don't care how careful you could be, well we stayed out of there but sometimes there was cases where I would go down there, they had a beach telephone for the evening, the night beach patrol

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guy, that's when I had to go down there and he had to go down there at night, that person. It was bothersome and then they brought out the Malatov Cocktails and we each had, we had those on the gun battery and the three inch Navy [video skips] now on December 7th. They were brought in about April and I was transferred from C Battery as the communicator at three inch Navy, just one. They split us up there. So I set up the communications there for that.

MR. MARTINEZ: At Sand or Eastern?

MR. GARDNER: Three inch Navy here at Sand. Right over here off the point.

MR. MARTINEZ: John it strikes me that being the telecommunications person that you were you had a lot of flexibility in your movement whereas in contrast to some of the battery people they couldn't move and get around. Could you get around the island and see what was going on?

MR. GARDNER: Upon occasion I have to go out to Frigate point there was one night only a few weeks after the war and my Frigate Point base end had no communication. And I was told it was dark and I don't remember just how it happened, but it was snagged by either the chow truck or something. The wire was laying on the ground. So the only thing I could do was go to the terminal strip and locate the wire and get the wire in my hand and follow it. They called the machine gun positions who, incidentally I was behind them, they couldn't have shot me very well except with a pistol, and they were told that a wireman would be in their area and I was challenged continually, probably to harass me as much as anything. And then the password at that time by the way was Honolulu. And you'd hear them half load the machine guns. I finally found the break in the wire and spliced it that night. So yeah, I got around. It was that night I was out at A Battery, had coffee with my friend Fowler there in the dugout and then carefully came back up to C Battery because I knew I was going to be challenged. And as I approached the guns there

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was one of these black goony birds and I couldn't see it in the dark, it's pretty dark. It took a shot at my leg and ripped my pant leg. I had already cut the flap off of a 45 holster, so I had the 45 out. I don't know what I was going to do with it. I figured it was a Jap. My pulse rate must have went up to 250.

MR. MARTINEZ: Did you send the goony bird to the hereafter?

MR. GARDNER: No. Couldn't see any bird anyway. One of the scares of [video skips] always remember. Yeah we moved around that way because going out and shooting [video skips] trouble. And then when we set up three inch Navy over here, well I put that communication in.

MR. MARTINEZ: In retrospect how would you rate to the battle of Midway?

MR. GARDNER: Well for what the U.S. had in the arsenal, we did pretty well. But we didn't have anything in the arsenal. You know 1916 five inch and what 1920's three inch? Radar was unheard of other than this 1270. I think that it was a gallant effort.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well let's go to the battle of Midway. Can you describe that day, exactly how the morning started for you and what the battle of midway was like for you.

MR. GARDNER: I'll take you back a day before that to the 3rd, is that alright?

MR. MARTINEZ: That's fine.

MR. GARDNER: You understand I wasn't on that switchboard all the time. There was other people and like I say we used to change positions and so on. The 3rd was an interesting day. PBY Patrol was out and I recall the message transmitted to us that they had located an occupation for us at about 750 miles and I think it was about 240, I can't remember the azimuth, but they were confident and they were told to come to return to get away from there. They had the location on it. The day proceeded with PBY Patrols, as history tells you they were searching for the strike force and a carrier force if there was one, we weren't sure. We knew we had a

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network of submarines out there. We were told that. We knew that we had some Navy up here with us. We had no idea how much. We were just told they were over here to the east of us someplace, we hoped. We were always told in training before leaving San Diego that we weren't expect to hold these islands, we didn't know which islands, forever more. The Navy will be there and they'll take care of you and by golly in this case they did. But that day was an interesting day and I'll tell you an event, and again not a figment of my imagination, it really happened. On the J line that evening of the 3rd, they sent two or three B17's, maybe one, I'm not certain of the number, but a B17 went out to westward to take a last look see before dark because they still weren't sure where those forces were. They knew where the occupation force was. That aircraft returned, it was dark, probably after we had been in condition one, I'm almost sure it was. There's no one talks [video skips] business. I could hear this conversation made between the pilot of one of those aircraft, or the only aircraft whichever it was, with someone high up in the command. I have no idea who and he reported, this is cross talk because of those lines under water, then just telephone wire with tar, we didn't have underground cable then. They cross talked a lot. I'm sure others on the J line heard it the same as I did. This pilot reported the fact that they had sighted a Japanese cruiser and we dropped bombs on it and we think we got hits on the fantail. And then the fire flew because he was reprimanded. There was anger in the man's voice telling him we didn't send you out there on a bombing run. You went out there to take a look see and tell us where they were. He was pretty furious, whoever this person was. The closing shot was the point alright, tomorrow's another day, you by God better sink some ships out there. Who they were I don't know. But I heard it. Interesting.

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MR. MARTINEZ: Can you describe to me the events of June 4, 1942. I'd like you to, when you recount this, I'd like you to recount it from your perspective. How your day began. How the battle began. How it went on and how it ended.

MR. GARDNER: We were awakened about 0400 as I recall because Eastern Island was going to start launching aircraft. So we set condition one, man the battle stations. I was in the dugout alone, well not really alone, the Navy Corpsman was there. I listened and heard them launch aircraft and as I recall they launched the B17's first and so on according to their fuel time in the air. And as I understand it, they were on - - around Curry Reef, 60 miles out. It seemed very strange to me that about 6:00 when the last aircraft were off except for the fighters, radar picked up the enemy aircraft at 90 miles, I think 340. Many unidentified aircraft. Quite fresh in my mind.

MR. MARTINEZ: What happened next?

MR. GARDNER: I set there. Nothing I could do.

MR. MARTINEZ: What kind of thoughts rolled through your mind? Do you remember that?

MR. GARDNER: You know I was very confident, just dumb I guess. One of my buddies from up in Iowa, he was really shaken up the evening before. He came in to talk to me and he'd had a dugout out there. We weren't going to fire you understand? You saw the gun over there, the antique. We had a pair of those here. We were camouflaged over, the nets were over them because we were not to fire until the enemy started over that reef out there. And hopefully our guns would be there and we could uncover and fire canister ammunition out there and burst these over the top of the landing craft and they would throw down shrapnel. So our gun crews dispersed. I was the only one in the dugout, the Corpsman and I. The others were well dispersed around the guns. And anyway he was quite shaken and to this

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day I'll never know. I tried to perk him up, he was no coward or anything like that, he was just shook up. I said aw hell, we'll kick the so-and-so out of them. We're going win this battle. It will be a big battle, it will be a big win for us. I don't know whether I knew that or I was spooking him up. Spooking him up I imagine. Turned out though the way I said. And he came, everybody in our battery came through fine. Didn't do anything. Didn't contribute anything to winning it. There was an aircraft came down strafing right over our positions and the pilot had the canopy open and was looking out and he looked right at our guns and then the guys who were shooting at him had a BAR and a yoke deal that you've heard described. And when they told me that I think I was more scared because I knew he knew where we were and when he came back what was about to happen, that he was going to take those guns, camouflage net and all. And my Battery Commander, Captain Augustine, I asked him if I could move the switchboard out of the dugout back to a position that we'd had established behind the guns just for this reason, just run parallel circuits out and I could pull the board and go out there and get in a little dugout I had out there. No he said, you're going to stay right there in that part. And I dreaded and dreaded the thought of the next bombing raid, the one that didn't come.

MR. MARTINEZ: That pilot that flew over, never came back, huh?

MR. GARDNER: Nobody came back. You know once they returned to the carrier and no one ever came back.

MR. MARTINEZ: Were you able to view the air battle above you?

MR. GARDNER: I couldn't no, I was in the dugout.

MR. MARTINEZ: You were in the dugout, so.

MR. GARDNER: All on that J line. If you getting a good account and hearing the booming and feeling the island shaking and all that, but not viewing it.

MR. MARTINEZ: How long did the raid go on?

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MR. GARDNER: I don't know, 20 minutes, 30 minutes would be my guess. I can't remember.

MR. MARTINEZ: When did you get, when you got the all clear you came out and what did you see?

MR. GARDNER: Well smoke over here on this side and burning and not a lot as you can think about over there behind the trees. You couldn't see a great deal. The talk was about the next raid, which we certainly contemplated and as I just mentioned it. They were running over looking for something to strafe and something to bomb when they came back. We all knew that. Shortly, I knew there was a airplane down behind C Battery, my old five inch battery of December 7th, and I did go over there and John Ford was shooting film. You've seen it, the one where the guy's holding the wing up with the red dot in it. I was standing just off to the side of that.

MR. MARTINEZ: Had you seen John Ford around here before?

MR. GARDNER: The only time I've ever seen him in my life was that few minutes that he did that.

MR. MARTINEZ: Did you have any conversation with him at all?

MR. GARDNER: Not that I recall. This other Marine had this wing up there and we may have passed a word or two, but nothing. The torso of the pilot was in the wreckage, it was burning. They almost put a wing right in one of our ready ammunition stashes, the closest one to the gun, where we draw from quickly. Looked like he stuck a wing in there, but I guess he was crashing. He didn't see it he just went in there by chance. But went over there, went back. The dread was, and then the word was out that the battleship was at 90 miles, that was pretty scary. You could visualize what was going to happen if that battleship, in another two to three hours you don't know what's going to happen. It was, that time I wasn't so confident whether we'd win the battle but things went on.



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MR. MARTINEZ: Were there any other highlights of that afternoon, that evening or that morning that you'd like to, that you remember? Do you remember the sunset that night?

MR. GARDNER: No.

MR. MARTINEZ: What were you doing, were you busy?

MR. GARDNER: I was back probably on the switchboard by evening because we stayed in quite a ready alert condition after the next 48 hours.

MR. MARTINEZ: Were you getting any information what was going on with the sea battle?

MR. GARDNER: Bits and pieces and the fact that I was on that J line what was released I heard it and we knew when the battleship turned around, I remember that. That was a sigh of relief. There was bit and pieces coming in. Far as the carriers being sunk, I can't tell you exactly when we found that out. I wish I knew, probably some time that afternoon. We were shelled that night by a submarine, you're aware of that?

MR. MARTINEZ: No. Tell me about that.

MR. GARDNER: Yeah there was a submarine came in and fired I wouldn't want to know for sure, six or eight rounds maybe and probably not that many from over here near the harbor entrance.

MR. MARTINEZ: When did you realize the battle of Midway was over?

MR. GARDNER: With confidence, probably about the 6th. A couple of days.

MR. MARTINEZ: How did you feel about all of that?

MR. GARDNER: Well we were quite elated. And it had turned out like I told my friend. It was a big win. It was blown out of proportion how many ships we sunk. I

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think the rumors were 15, 17 ships and you know, as you'd expect it was not accurate, but it was a good win.

MR. MARTINEZ: How did you feel after all of this? Did you think your defenses here would have held? Did you think it was adequate enough?

MR. GARDNER: No. I don't think we could have held. They had too much fire power. That battleship alone and a couple of cruisers, they'd have leveled this place. We'd have never fired the three inch Navy guns, I don't think.

MR. MARTINEZ: They'd have been knocked out you think?

MR. GARDNER: Well sure, I don't see how they could have missed. All we can go by is our own experience later years how we would bombard islands and there they were still there when we went ashore, some survivors, I suppose, would have put up a dying gasp battle.

MR. MARTINEZ: Now that you've come back to Midway, do you have a different perspective about this place than you had when you left?

MR. GARDNER: Well it's a different island. It's larger, it has more vegetation, it didn't have those daisies you're looking at, it didn't have all these trees. Those two palms trees weren't here. There weren't any palm trees here. Few papaya. It was a barren, white place. This green grass wasn't here. It's definitely larger, we know that. They've dredged up. It's a different place, a prettier place. I'm grateful to participate in the Midway battle, but I can't say I contributed anything to winning it.

MR. MARTINEZ: When did you leave Midway?

MR. GARDNER: I left on November 2, 1942, 50 years and what, - - days ago.

MR. MARTINEZ: Can you summarize what your career was like from this point on to the end of the war?

MR. GARDNER: Very fortunate. I left here on the 2nd with approximately 125 men on the submarine, it was sea plane tender, the Wright. We went to Pearl, it took

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about three days I think we got in there about the 5th. And we weren't certain by any means, you never know when you're in the lower ranks what's going to happen. But in two or three days at liberty in Honolulu and we were aboard the Mount Vernon, a large Atlantic steamer converted to a transport and we ran to San Francisco. Destroyers took us out a few miles and turned us loose and we went unescorted and we made it in like 80-odd hours, we were in San Francisco. We were given a short leave, 15 days was the maximum they would give in those days, and back to the Marine Corps base. They were still using the Marine Corps base, not Camp Pendleton at that time. Started forming the 12th Defense Battalion with recruits, about 125 of us roughly. It was pretty obvious that weren't going to be in San Diego long and we weren't going to leave very well trained, but we knew the mission. I had submitted a letter here on Midway to go to an advanced telephone communications school called the telephone electrician's course at Camp Lejeune. It was at Quantico when I put in for it. Of course, strangely the letter came back quite fast from the Commandant for me to reapply upon my return to the United States.

MR. MARTINEZ: Okay we're going to cut right there.

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MR. MARTINEZ: You were back in San Diego being trained. Did you get to go to that advanced telephone school?

MR. GARDNER: I went to the school and completed the six month school, completed the school. I was a Sergeant at the time and the school, Officer in charge of the school called me in and upon graduation and asked me, gave me two choices. Pretty neat. Go to Cherry Point with the 6th Marine Airwing and make Master Tech Sergeant in probably about two weeks he said, or how would you like to stay here as an instructor because - - instructors here are all Staff Non-coms, none have been overseas. And it took me a couple of seconds to say I'll stay here. And it turned out

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over a period of time that he was transferred and I was in charge of the school replacing a, it rated a Warrant Officer to First Lieutenant. And I ran the school for quite a time. We had 100 students that I was in charge of. The courses were laid out. Major Bradshaw came down from Washington one day and I said Major when am I going back overseas? I'm due for rotation. He said Gardner you're not going anyplace, you're going to stay here until the war's over. That didn't happen. I was grabbed one time, it's a little longer story with 11 others and sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri, to go to Army Communications School to really learn teletype. I had been to Chicago and various other training on it and was teaching it in that school. And we really learned teletype down there from some really efficient people. All for the invasion of Japan. And we got out to Pearl mid-June. [video skips] So you see I was lucky I was away during the worst of the Pacific Campaign. Found out that I was assigned to the Comm Ship Mount Olympus for the invasion of Japan. She was laying too in Pearl Harbor. I was aboard a number of times, but never slept aboard. They dropped the atomic bomb. And I had 22 months to do. Got on the APA, I needed some duty bad, it was getting boring and the war was over and I went over, Major Bradshaw was back there, the same one that had told me you're not going anyplace, you're going to be here for the duration.

MR. MARTINEZ: You were an Officer then?

MR. GARDNER: No, no, I was a Staff Sergeant because rates are frozen. I had a chance to go on a Warrant Officer list, another story. I turned it down. I said no I just want to be a Master Tech Sergeant, give me six stripes and forget it. And went over to see Major Bradshaw, which in a way a little out of order. I shouldn't have, but he knew me from back there. And I said I need some duty. War's over, give me something to do. And again another choice and I said I don't know why I'm so lucky, really. He said you want to go to the 5th Marine Amphibious Corps, or the 3rd Marine

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Amphibious Corps? And I asked him who the personnel were in each and I said I'll take the 3rd. So I went to Guam, joined the 3rd, took charge of the teletype, they were discharging people. We boarded about 16 LSM's and went to China. We had no Officers that knew anything about teletype. I had four Corporals and a Sergeant for a time that did. We set up the communication to handle General Marshall's traffic out of Peking, Beijing now. They run thousands upon thousands of six letter code, five letter code groups. And all I had to do is be sure that that got to Washington, D.C. Well I only had the one link from Peking to Shanghai and then later we got a better transmitter and we were shooting it right to Guam and then Washington, D.C. So I had great duty. We had Staff Non-coms lived like Kings. Had a Russian girlfriend that was quite convenient. I lived great in China, but not enough to stay in the Marine Corps. So I got out, I was discharged one day late, June 14, 1946.

MR. MARTINEZ: How old were you then?

MR. GARDNER: 25.

MR. MARTINEZ: Did the Marine Corps prepare you for the rest of your life?

MR. GARDNER: Really I did work at the telephone company for six years. I found it a little boring. I found out [video skips] we were building apartments. Found out there was easier money to be made and then the Korean War came and couldn't get materials and between the two of us, we had an Associate's deal, I said you run it and through another Marine buddy I got in the automotive parts business and stayed for 35 years, 33 years.

MR. MARTINEZ: Was Midway a crossroads for your life?

MR. GARDNER: Oh sure. Sure it was an important part of my life. That's why I wanted to come back.

MR. MARTINEZ: In what way was it a crossroads of your life?

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MR. GARDNER: I guess you can say you become a man. You found out that you had ability and you could do things and you were capable and I think I proved I was trustworthy. When somebody told me to do something it was done. I figured the rest of my life I could do that and I did. I had no problems in life that way. I was sales manager for a company with about 30 men scattered around the western U.S. and western Canada and Hawaii and eventually the boss practically gave me free reign. You know the Marine Corps training did not hurt. Once [video skips] about five years he had confidence I could do just about anything I wanted as long as they made money. Well I've had a good life really. Very fortunate person.

MR. MARTINEZ: You said you learned a lot based on your training, but what do you think you lost? Did you lose anything because of World War II?

MR. GARDNER: No. I don't think so. I'd like to say something to you. You bring out something and I wanted to say I spoke to Bill about. There was a young man that joined us over here in three inch Navy a month before the Midway battle. His name was Jenkins and he was about 24 or 25 years old, a graduate of Purdue and was going to be in the newspaper business. To me he was a mentor of sorts to me. He used to sit by me at the switchboard and talk and he complimented me in San Diego recently. He said I liked to talk to you, you were smarter than the rest. I don't know that's a fact, but he did a lot for me. And one day he was sitting there talking, not directly, but he said a war is something everyone should live through. Think about it. If you live through it you do gain a lot. If you don't' it's not too good, that's for sure. And I reminded him of that statement here last June. We reminisced about it and all.

MR. MARTINEZ: So in a sense your character was not so much changed, but developed.

MR. GARDNER: That's the best way to put it I would think.

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MR. MARTINEZ: Would you have, would you like to have a similar experience for your son? All you went through?

MR. GARDNER: My son I wish would have went in the service, but probably would have been a bad thing because it was Viet Nam time and I was gung ho whip the Communists which I look back was in error I guess. I'm not sure my son would have went. I have to tell you he might have been a Clinton, I'm not too sure. I think about four years in the Marine Corps or the Navy wouldn't have hurt him one bit. He's a good guy, he's 42 years old, but wouldn't hurt him.

MR. MARTINEZ: Why did you come back to Midway?

MR. GARDNER: I wanted to come back for a long time. When I first got involved with this group I asked them why can't we go to Midway. They said we've already tried and they won't let us. I don't know. I grew up here I guess. I wanted to come here and see what the old homestead looked like. Quite surprised by what I found.

MR. MARTINEZ: When you see that symbol of the Marine Corps, the globe with the eagle and the anchor, what's that mean to you?

MR. GARDNER: I am extremely proud to have been a Marine and I feel many times I really wasn't qualified to be one, I wasn't that good. Really. I often wondered if I had been in the jungle warfare of Guadalcanal with cold steel how good would I have been? And that's bothered me. I've thought about that. I think you develop and you do it when you have to. But I thought about that. Supposing, because the 12th Defense Battalion, if I hadn't have been transferred out, they had pretty heavy casualties because they made an infantry out of them at Pelelieu. They had so many casualties. Then they used to have a lot of bombing attacks on - - . It was a tough field. I think I could have handled that maybe, but I don't know about this cold steel business in the jungles of Guadalcanal. Being honest. I hope I could have withheld

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Marine Corps standards. I think that bothers a lot of kids at that time. It goes through your mind, can I and will I? Being brave here was pretty easy, really.

MR. MARTINEZ: Is there any topic or any subject that we didn't cover that you'd like to discuss?

MR. GARDNER: I think we've covered it very, very well. Glad to have been able to do it.

MR. MARTINEZ: Have you met new friends?

MR. GARDNER: Very few of these fellows I knew really. You know, going back three or four years ago I only knew one or two.

MR. MARTINEZ: What do you think of all these guys?

MR. GARDNER: Great bunch of guys. It's been a ball for me. I have been, I've traveled a good bit in my life. Had a job that caused me to travel the United States, Canada and Alaska and Hawaii. Traveling to me, I don't get very excited. I'm criticized by a lady friend, you just don't get excited when we go anywhere. I said no not really, I been. But she said the other day, you're sure excited about going to Midway and I says you better believe I am. She says I know you are, you're really up on a high. I know I am.

MR. MARTINEZ: There is one other thing I want to talk to you about. Admiral Nimitz came here on the 5th of May of 1942.

[END AUDIO]